

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain

News Release

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Focus exhibition features the most complete surviving example of a Gothic table fountain and includes a rare painting by Renaissance Master Jan van Eyck and other international loans

Cleveland, OH (October 12, 2016) –*Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain* will, for the first time, present the museum's Gothic table fountain as the focus of a single exhibition. The table fountain will be displayed among a group of objects including luxury silver, hand-washing vessels, enamels, illuminated manuscripts and a major painting. Each will inform some aspect of the



fountain's history, functionality, presumed use and context, materials, technique, dating and style. Some of these works are important international loans, notably Jan van Eyck's painting ***Madonna at the Fountain*** from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, which also comprises part of the museum's centennial loan program ^[1]. Van Eyck is considered the most significant Northern Renaissance artist of the 15th century, and only about 25 surviving paintings can be confidently attributed to him; *Madonna at the Fountain* is one of them. Since most of van Eyck's paintings are rarely permitted to travel, this will be only the second time in history that a work by the artist has been exhibited in Cleveland.

Also on view are the *Grandes Chroniques de France* from the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Commissioned by the French king Charles V (reigned 1364–80), this rarely traveled and lightsensitive manuscript is a vernacular history of the French kings assembled from translated Latin chronicles and other medieval documents. Due to the sensitivity of the object, the *Grandes Chroniques de France* will only be on view until January 9, 2017. *Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain* is co-curated by Stephen N. Fliegel, curator of medieval art at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Elina Gertsman, professor of art history at Case Western Reserve University. Admission to the show is free, and the exhibition will remain on view in the Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery through February 26, 2017.

"The Cleveland Museum of Art's Gothic table fountain is one of the rarest and most significant objects in the museum's renowned medieval collection," said William M. Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "We are fortunate to showcase this treasure among other iconic masterworks including *Madonna at the Fountain* and the *Grandes Chroniques de France*. These objects establish a rich context for the table fountain and answer questions about its origin, history and functionality. By bringing these artworks together, the exhibition speaks to the global influence of the museum and offers a true, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for visitors."

"The exhibition explores one of the world's rarest medieval objects—the last surviving Gothic table fountain—and the only exemplar of its genre," said Fliegel. "It is elucidated in the context of two royal manuscripts, the *Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux* and the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, commissioned by the French king Charles V in 1378, both of which rarely travel. The presence of a small painting by Jan van Eyck, the greatest northern painter of the 15th century, illustrates conceptually how the Cleveland fountain may have originally been deployed. The loan of the van Eyck by the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp is unprecedented."

Impressive in their sheer technical wizardry, table fountains are mechanical devices with moving parts that spouted (sometimes perfumed) water, and are known especially from inventories. Once thought to have graced banqueting tables, they were more likely placed on pedestals in strategic locations in palaces, where they were exhibited as spectacles of ingenuity by their owners to delight their guests. Such objects did not originate in the European West, but were probably introduced through the Byzantine and Islamic worlds.

Conceptually and stylistically, the Cleveland table fountain is a stunning piece of Gothic architecture in miniature, with parapets, arcades, vaults, pinnacles, columns and arches with tracery. The

goldsmith responsible for this object was unquestionably inspired by the great Gothic buildings of his time. The Cleveland table fountain is a three-tiered assembly featuring cast and chased elements to which were attached a series of enamel plaques representing grotesque figures, some of which play musical instruments. Water wheels and bells were added to capture motion and sound. The rich detail and ornamentation of this object suggest it would have been expensive to produce and highly treasured by its original owner.

Cleveland's table fountain is datable to about 1320–40, and was likely produced in Paris for a person of high status, perhaps a member of the royal court. It is internationally recognized as a unique example of a genre now understood primarily through documentary sources. These fountains existed in the 14th and 15th centuries in substantial numbers. They assumed various forms but were always made from precious metals and sometimes embellished with colorful enamels or semiprecious stones. Table fountains were probably returned to the goldsmith's shop for conversion into vessels or coinage once they ceased to function or the fashion had passed, accounting for the scarcity of surviving examples today.

Exhibition Catalogue:

The exhibition is accompanied by a 164-page scholarly catalogue, *Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain*, the third book in the museum's Cleveland Masterwork series. Authored by Stephen N. Fliegel, curator of medieval art at the Cleveland Museum of art, and Elina Gertsman, professor of art history at Case Western Reserve University, the catalogue reassesses Cleveland's Gothic table fountain in the context of other similar luxury objects, analyzing specifically the fountain's history, function, materials and style.

The catalogue includes 15 entries on the objects in the exhibition by Fliegel and participants in Case Western Reserve University's graduate seminar on leisure and piety in late medieval Europe. This seminar, taught by Elina Gertsman, explored a wide array of major themes in medieval art, keyed to specific works in the CMA's collection. The seminar was made possible by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has been instrumental in the CMA–CWRU collaborative doctoral program in art history.

Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain can be purchased for \$29.95 at the museum gift shop, or the museum's online store by visiting cmastore.org [2].

Centennial Loan on View:

***Madonna at the Fountain*, 1439**

Jan van Eyck (Flemish, 1390–1441)



Madonna at the Fountain, 1439. Jan van Eyck (Flemish, 1390–1441). Oil on panel; 19 x 12.5 cm. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunst, Antwerp, inv. no. 411.

The painter Jan van Eyck is today considered the most significant Northern Renaissance artist of the 15th century. He was court painter to Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, and was patronized extensively by the Burgundian court. It is known from the historical record that van Eyck was considered a revolutionary master across northern Europe even within his own lifetime; his approach to painting was heavily copied by other painters. Van Eyck's virtuoso technique exploits the use of oils to describe light and sumptuous draperies with an almost photographic realism. His style placed the visible world at the heart of his painting and changed perceptions forever. There are only about 25 surviving paintings that can be confidently attributed to Jan van Eyck. Most of these are rarely permitted to travel, and the exhibition therefore presents a unique and special opportunity to display a work by Jan van Eyck at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

About the Centennial Loan Program

In celebration of its 2016 centennial, the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) is marking its anniversary with a series of exceptional loans from select collections around the world. Some are directly related to works in the museum's permanent holdings; others highlight an artist or object not currently represented in the collection. This year-long program includes masterworks from such eminent museums as the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. More than a dozen works of art spanning five hundred years and representing cultures from four continents will be featured.

Highlights in Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain:

Grandes Chroniques de France, 1378–79



The Feast of the Order of the Star, from the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, c. 1378–79. France, Paris. Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum. Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS. Fr. 2813, folio 394 recto.

Known as the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, this manuscript is a vernacular history of the French kings assembled from translated Latin chronicles and other medieval documents. It was commissioned by the French king Charles V (reigned 1364–80), who ordered that it include new sections describing his own life and the history of the Valois dynasty. The text and illustrations in the *Grandes Chroniques* are part of a program intended to reinforce the power of Charles V's family and its right to rule during a period of conflict and uncertainty.

Among other historical events within the manuscript, the miniature on this richly illuminated page shows the founding of the chivalric Order of the Star in 1351 by King John the Good of France, father of Charles V. Here the knights of the order are seen wearing a badge formed from an eight-pointed star, identical to those on the Cleveland table fountain both in form and color. In the lower register, the order is depicted at its annual banquet held at Saint-Ouen. The common use of the star motif on the table fountain would strongly affirm its links to the same chivalric order.

***Hours of Jeanne d'Évreux*, 1325–28**

Jean Pucelle (French, active 1319–34)



The Hours of Jeanne d'Évreux, c. 1325–28. Jean Pucelle (French, active 1319–34). Ink and tempera on vellum; 9.3 x 6.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 54.1.2.

Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

One of the most influential artists of the Parisian Gothic style, Jean Pucelle completed several commissions for the royal family during his relatively brief career. This private devotional book known as a book of hours was most likely commissioned by King Charles IV of France for his third wife and queen, Jeanne d'Évreux, sometime between their marriage in 1324 and the king's death in 1328. Pucelle's manuscript illuminations are usually identified by the presence of inventive human-animal hybrid figures, called *drolleries*, in the margins. He renders these grotesque figures in shades of black and white, with only occasional washes of sheer color—a technique that came to be known as *grisaille*. The manuscript demonstrates a common decorative vocabulary with the table fountain, which was produced in Paris around the same time.

Related Programming

MIX: Metal

Friday, November 4, 5:00–10:00 p.m.

\$8/\$10 at the door. CMA members free

The glitter of gold, the sheen of silver—this MIX is all about metal in art. Take a tour of the Armor Court, get the chance to touch real armor and discover one of the museum's most unique objects in *Myth & Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain*. Plus, enjoy big brass sound in the atrium with Cleveland's own Revolution Brass Band. MIX is an 18-and-over event.

Gallery Talk: The Table Fountain

Wednesday, November 16, 6:00 p.m.

Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery.

One of the museum's most unique objects is explored in depth in *Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain*, now on view through February 26. Join Stephen N. Fliegel, curator of medieval art, for a discussion of the table fountain's history and context in the exhibition. *Please note that space is limited; reservations required. Repeated on Wed/Jan 25, 6:00.*

Lecture: Enchanted Woods and Living Waters: Medieval Fountains in Word and Image **Saturday, February 18, 2:00 p.m.**

Lecture Hall.

Simultaneously perilous and tantalizing, medieval fountains were paradoxical, hybrid things: they indexed love and loss, joy and suffering, passion and danger, life and death. Elena Gertsman, professor of art history at Case Western Reserve University, addresses representations of fountains in late medieval art and literature. She will take the audience from the wilds of Broceliande to the parks of pleasure, and from the unattainable springs of eternal youth to the cleansing waters of the fountain of life. Free, reservations required. Reserve tickets through the box office at 216-421-7350 or online at engage.clevelandart.org.

Performing Arts

Fretwork

Wednesday, October 12, 7:30 p.m.

\$33–\$45; CMA members \$30–\$40

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, Fretwork is a champion of great English consort music, from Taverner to Purcell. The ensemble is also a pioneer of contemporary music for viols, having commissioned more than 40 new works. For its performance in Cleveland, the ensemble presents works from the 16th and 17th centuries by John Taverner, Christopher Tye, Henry Purcell, Robert Parsons and

William Lawes, as well as works by contemporary composers Maja Ratkje, Nico Muhly and Gavin Bryars. Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain*.

CIM/CWRU Joint Music Program

Wednesday, December 7, 2016, 6:00 p.m., Free; no ticket required.

The popular series of monthly concerts in the galleries featuring young artists from the Cleveland Institute of Music and the joint program with Case Western Reserve University's early and baroque music programs continues. Outstanding conservatory musicians present mixed programs of chamber music amid the museum's collections for a unique and intimate experience.

Music by 14th-century French composer Guillaume de Machaut and his contemporaries, in conjunction with *Myth and Mystique: Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain* on view in the Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery.

Table Fountain Image caption

Table Fountain, c. 1320–40. France, Paris. Gilt-silver, translucent enamel on *basse-taille*, opaque enamel; 31.1 x 24.1 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of J. H. Wade 1924.859.

Centennial Celebration

One hundred years ago the Cleveland Museum of Art opened its doors to the public. In 2016 the museum invites all audiences to celebrate its 100th anniversary, honoring the past and looking ahead to the future. Program highlights include special centennial exhibitions representing the creative genius of four continents, spanning ancient to contemporary art, as well as the presentation of extraordinary individual works of art on loan from top-tier institutions all over the world, and once-in-a-lifetime events and community programs.

For more information about centennial year events, visit clevelandart.org/centennial.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant

international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [3].

[Press Announcements](#) [4]

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Links

[1] <http://www.clevelandart.org/centennial/centennial-loans>

[2] <http://store.cmastore.org/myandmyclgot.html>

[3] <https://www.clevelandart.org>

[4] <https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit>